



INTRO:

Read an incredibly sad story this week about a North Carolina father who died just after his daughter's 9th birthday party, when upon driving home on a rainy night, his car's GPS guided him to take a turn on a bridge that...unfortunately had been destroyed back in 2013. Apparently, the GPS wasn't updated so, tragically, he drove right off the road and into a river.¹ Incredibly sad! Cuz obviously this father was doing anything wrong. He was just following his GPS/a form of VIRTUAL reality, rather than the actual reality of the road! Easy to do **right**? AND if ya think about it, REALLY easy to do with so much of our lives, GIVEN that we live in a very VR, plastic, curated world. So it's becoming increasingly difficult to separate reality - fake news, deepfakes - from virtual reality...And YET, ya have to **don't you?** Cuz if you aren't following reality/if your life isn't in submission TO reality, you could obviously find yourself in a river!

One of the things we're attempting to do with our **"That You Believe"** series through John is get a grasp on, not only, the reality of Jesus, but the reality of Jesus as the ULTIMATE reality around which we're to center our lives. Or as John says, *"believe He's the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing have life in his name."*

But here's the thing/and maybe you're already feeling this 2 chapters into **John**: It's a challenge, **right**, to know if you're believing and following the real Jesus! In some senses, it even feels like Jesus sometimes MAKES it a challenge. Cuz last week, if you were with us, ya know the picture we got of Jesus in turning water to wine was this gentle, meek, mild, delighting to help-those-in-need Jesus. Whereas today, He seems totally different. At the wedding last week, He was the greatest party-maker ever. But as John says in **v.12** there, *"right after that,"* we get Jesus, HERE, as the greatest party-POOPER ever...Last week, He was acting quietly, privately, behind the scenes. This week He's dramatic, public, and out front... There, people asked Him for help. Here He seems to be intruding... There he brought festive joy. Here, He's literally upsetting the Passover festivities. ***I mean what's the deal? Is Jesus schizophrenic? How are we supposed to have Him as our ultimate reality? Even more/and here's the question I want us to consider today: How do ya know IF you're following or missing Jesus AS your ultimate reality?...*** That's the question! So **Let's Pray**, and then we'll study this passage under the heading OF that question: *"Lord Jesus, it shouldn't surprise us that you being perfectly God and perfectly human necessarily and at times confuse the heck out us. And we confess that it is OFTEN that confusion/that seeming lack of coherence that takes us out as your followers OR keeps us from BECOMING your followers. And so we pray that you would reveal yourself to us in such a way this morning that we can't HELP but see you for who you are. And in seeing you, orient all our lives AROUND you. Please don't let us miss you. We pray this in your name...Amen!"*

¹ People Magazine - Charmaine Patterson - Oct 7, 2022 - <https://apple.news/ABLF7N4jiRrK-cNxT0JYOrw>

TEXT:²

So it's hard for us to imagine the shock that Jesus' temple-cleansing actions here would've caused. Cuz unlike Ancient Jews we don't tend to live with ultimate reality in mind/what you might call a "temple mindset," or this idea of the sacred! THOUGH I think you can make the case that in the last 20/30 years that's changing - there's a huge upswing in spiritual interest and just a desire to live and work for things beyond ourselves. Look no further than that great theological documentary...The Bachelorette...which, ridiculous it may be, nevertheless shows how much we long for things like nostalgia, love and just to be connected to something greater than ourselves...The Jews believed that in spades, to the point that the temple, was for them, the place where life and ultimate reality collided. You didn't need to go on a pre-determined date to Mayorka, you just needed to go to, as ya see in **vv.12-13**, Jerusalem for Passover. - Passover of course being the celebration of when, in the book of *Exodus*, God delivered Israel from Egyptian captivity and, really, manifested the ultimate reality of His presence and power in a way He hadn't done prior! And so every year, Jews would travel to Jerusalem to celebrate. Historians actually estimate that while the permanent population of Jerusalem at the time was about 80,000 - so like 2 Southies; during Passover it would balloon to nearly 500,000/so like 12.5 Southies!³ Serious parking issues...So needless to say, the ruckus Jesus causes here is very public!

WHICH, you see there in **vv.14-16**, is motivated by Jesus finding the temple having essentially been turned into a commercial enterprise. Jesus says, "*you've turned my Father's house into a house of trade.*" And the Greek there is literally "emporium." The temple'd become like a public market...Now to be clear, it's not that these people were doing anything unlawful or overtly sinful per se that ticked Jesus off. Actually, they were, in many respects, providing a service. Since the reason the population of Jerusalem ballooned was, of course, because people were traveling from all over in order to come TO Jerusalem and offer up sacrifices as a part of Passover. So if you're traveling from foreign lands, you can't well bring your own ox, goat or sheep with you. This is before TSA allowed, ya know, service chickens and such - So what you'd do is leave YOUR animals at home and then upon arrival BUY a sacrificial animal. Made things A LOT easier...But of course when you get 500,000 people doing this - what's supposed to be a place of worship, reflection, prayer, instead becomes a place of shouting, bartering, haggling, and "*trade.*" In other words, while these people got, you could say, the formal details of worship, they'd FORgotten the FUNCTION of worship. They'd made something that was supposed to be relational, totally mechanical and contractual...So when Jesus sees it - sees all these people basically turning HIS Father, whom we're to enjoy, love, be loved by, for whom He's gonna

² Message aided by insights from numerous sermons including:

- "TRACTATE X - Chapter 2:12-21. - Augustine of Hippo, "Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel according to St. John." in *St. Augustine: Homilies on the Gospel of John, Homilies on the First Epistle of John, Soliloquies*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. John Gibb and James Innes, vol. 7, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1888), 69.
- "Jesus, the Temple of God - John 2:13-25" - D. A. Carson, "Jesus, the Temple of God," in *D. A. Carson Sermon Library* (Bellingham, WA: Faithlife, 2016), Jn 2:13-25.
- "Fire and Soap - Gospel of John, Part 1" - November 18, 1990 - John 2:12-21 - Timothy J. Keller, *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive* (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013).
- "The Final Temple - The Hard Sayings of Jesus" - August 20, 2000 - John 2:15-21 - Timothy J. Keller, *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive* (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013).
- "Lord of the Whips - The Real Jesus, Part 2; His Life" - November 24, 1996 - John 2:12-25 - Timothy J. Keller, *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive* (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013).
- "Episode 51: The True Temple" - Larkcast - June 28, 2022 - <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/larkcast/id1339351918?i=1000567970255>

³ "Fire and Soap - Gospel of John, Part 1" - November 18, 1990 - John 2:12-21 - Timothy J. Keller, *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive* (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013).

willing die - into essentially a cosmic turnstile, where ya insert your sacrifice, pull the lever, punch your ticket, and move-on - He rightly gets pissed! Says He *“made a whip of cords, drove em out, poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables.”* ...NOW a lot of people’ll say, *“this is why I don’t believe the Bible! Jesus literally whipping people out of the temple like some cattle-driver? Come on? That’s not only unjust; it doesn’t reconcile with the Jesus we see in the rest of Scripture.”* ...And to be clear, that would be true IF but for two things: **One**, if the *“whip of cords”* Jesus was using were what we assume it to be. Cuz when you think “whip” **what immediately comes to mind?** Something like a bunch leather straps woven together to produce a weapon right? But that’s not what Jesus is using here. Greek experts’ll tell you that that word *“cords”* should really be translated *“rushes or weeds,”* like from which you’d make a basket or papyrus.⁴ So NOT something that could’ve hurt people. BUT still something that produced the effect of causing people to run out of the temple.

And you say, *but if nobody’s getting hurt, why are they running?* Well because the **Second** thing you gotta see here is that: These folks must’ve had a kind of instinctive understanding of Jesus’ authority. **What do I mean?** I mean, in a crude way, it’s kinda like if you’ve ever been to a party that got busted by the Cops - I know that’s none of you. But in the instance you’ve heard of such things - **what does everyone do when they hear the cops are coming? They run right?** And that’s cuz we instinctively know we’re not doing what we should be AND that the Cops have the authority to TELL us that!...I think a similar thing is going on here. These people KNOW they shouldn’t be “worshipping” God in this contractual, form-over-function way AND given the word about Jesus that’s spread from folks like John the Baptist and even those who experienced Jesus’ first miracle; these folks KNOW Jesus has the authority to TELL em that.

This is why, you see in **v.17**, the disciples are watching Jesus here, and it says, *“they remembered that it was written - specifically in Psalm 69 - that the Messiah would be filled with zeal for His Father’s house.”* They’re looking at this and going, *“Oh! Jesus really does have a kind of higher level-authority. Cuz He’s the One whom the Scriptures have always talked about.”* ...They know! Not to mention, you see in **v.18**, when the Jews respond to Jesus, they do so **by what?** Demanding that He PROVE His authority. *“Show us a sign.”* In other words, they’re not questioning His authority. Rather they’re standing in judgment of Him by acting as their OWN authority! Like, asking the Cops to show you their badge...They know too!

Which if you keep going, is WHY Jesus responds the way He does in equating His death and resurrection to destroying and raising up the temple. Cuz here’s what He’s saying/**Listen**: He’s saying, *“You guys are asking, ‘what gives me the authority to act like I OWN this temple.’ But what you don’t understand is...I AM the temple! I AM the one who bridges the gap between you and ultimate reality...because in dying, I’LL be the One who’s sacrificed - the true Lamb of God - rather than you having to keep bringing your OWN lambs. And then in rising, I’LL be the One who raises everything up to new life, so that there’s nothing you need to do - no sacrifices, no prayers, no incantations, no nothing - except believe, in order to meet with God, find acceptance*

⁴ “Lord of the Whips - The Real Jesus, Part 2; His Life”—November 24, 1996 - John 2:12-25 - Timothy J. Keller, *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive* (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013).

and connect with ultimate reality.” I mean honestly, it’s an ASTOUNDING claim that, frankly, makes Jesus, as C.S. Lewis famously said, “*either a liar, a lunatic...or actually the Son of God.*” What He can’t be with claims like that is someone you miss Him or simply breeze past!...AND YET, we do, **don’t we?** These Jewish leaders did! These people who fled the temple did! OR like ya see in **vv.23-25**, the general masses did too, given that, while it says, “*they believed in Jesus.*” They didn’t really! They only believed-in Him cuz of the “*signs*” and cool things He was doing. They weren’t surrendered to Him, which is why Jesus didn’t “*entrust*” Himself TO them...It’s SO easy to miss Jesus, and as a result, run the car of your life...off the road of reality.

APPLICATION:

So let me give you **3 Very Common Ways We Tend To Miss Jesus/The Ways.** **First**, when you focus on form over function, or better said, **religion over relationship.** This was the problem with these Jewish leaders **right?** AND sadly many so-called “mature” Christians/even many Pastors and Christian leaders, who take this kind of market-approach to God, where ya know, instead of the focus being God and being WITH God, it’s religious activity and doing FOR God. Cuz ya see there in **v.16**, where Jesus tells those who were selling things to “*take em away cuz they’re making His Father’s house a house of trade?*” What He’s saying there is that those things are mutually exclusive. meaning you can have a market-approach to God OR you can have a being-in-the-Father’s-house-approach. But you can’t have both. You can’t enjoy a relationship with God while you’re at the same time trying to buy your way TO God.

Now look, that’s not to say, that God doesn’t care about what we do or even how we approach Him. He absolutely does! As I’ve told you many times, the Gospel is not opposed to effort. We work hard/study hard. We share our faith, give generously, invite, connect, open our homes. COMMIT to one another! The Gospel’s not opposed to effort! But it is opposed to earning. So if the focus for you is more about conformity to a set of behaviors - perhaps cuz that’s what “good Christians, good Catholics, good people” do - rather than LOVING God, you’re gonna miss Him! Because of course, among the many problems with mechanical, contractual religion...is there’s no passion it. ACTUALLY and more often than not, there’s grumpiness. This is why, sadly, church people are often the grumpiest and worst to be around - sadly I can speak from experience. Cuz religion makes us grumpy in all kinds of ways: **Grumpy with God** for example, when you feel like you’re upholding your end of the bargain, but God isn’t rewarding or blessing in the way you think He should...It makes us **Grumpy with Others**, cuz perhaps you feel like you’re growing spiritually, but others aren’t. Others aren’t where they need to be, or where you want or prefer them to be...Religion even makes us **Grumpy with Ourselves**, cuz we can easily feel like we’re SUPPOSED to be doing all these different things, so that when we don’t, or can’t, or don’t do em well enough, we then assume God’s not gonna bless us... It’s ALL a function of elevating form OVER function/religion over relationship!...**Is that you?**...OR like King David in **Psalm 42** do you say, no matter what’s going on around - how many ours your working, demanding your job is, tough parenting is, hopeless dating prospects are, tiring marriage is - “*God as the deer pants for the water, so my soul longs for you.*”...Or like **Charles Spurgeon** said, “*I thank thee that this which is a necessity of my life, is also its greatest delight, so I do at this hour oh my God feed upon thee.*”...Or like **Brother Lawrence** famously said, “*I find myself*

attached to God with greater sweetness and delight than an infant at his mother's breast." I mean let's be honest, that's a whole different category of relationship with God than most of us know. WAY deeper than anything mere religion can create!

Second, maybe it's not religion over relationship for ya; maybe it's **self-sufficiency over surrender** that's causing you to miss Jesus. Cuz this was the issue with those fleeing the temple **right?** I mean they were great when they were doing their sacrifices and basically everything was under THEIR authority. But the minute Jesus shows up and, with real authority, they're out!... And I see this all the time: People who are good with Jesus when you feel like you understand Him, are being blessed BY Him, and generally have life comfortable and under YOUR control. But eventually, there comes a time, because Jesus is utterly committed to making you look more like Him and trust more IN Him - He starts rearranging/even overturning some things in your life. Maybe speaks to you through a sermon, or a conversation with a friend/even a painful experience, since pain tends to, better than anything, shatter the illusion of our self-sufficiency. But He starts rearranging and overturning turning something about what you believe or how you're living...BUT Because we're people enflamed with ourselves, **how do we tend to respond?** Instead of saying, "*Jesus, you're the true temple/you're ultimate reality so you get to tell me what to believe and how to live,*" we say, "*thanks but no thanks...I'm out!*"

Incidentally, Friends, THIS is the reason why some of you who've been trying to have a relationship with God for what seems like forever now - trying all kinds of different churches, Bible studies, friend groups, disciplines-even, can never really stick with it, and are always up & down. Ya know, ya have seasons of spiritual excitement and urgency, but it quickly wanes. You're HERE for a few weeks/months-even but then suddenly not - ghosting people. You're walking with the Lord but then suddenly work, kids, life-stressors begin to crowd it all out. And that's not to say that those things should be minimized. Those things are where we live. And it's certainly not to say that you're a bad person or more sinful than the rest of us BECAUSE you're up & down. It's just to say: you haven't resolved: that Jesus isn't a co-founder of your life. Isn't your co-pilot or an angel investor in the startup that is your best life now! He's not even a set of teachings you decide to follow or not. Friend, He's ultimate reality/the true temple. And like a road with it's bridge out, the only thing you do with ultimate reality is surrender TO it...OR be broken BY it! **Is that you?** Are you missing Jesus because instead of surrendering every area of your life to His authority, you continue to live in the myth of your self-sufficiency?

Finally, maybe it's not religion over relationship or self-sufficiency over surrender; MAYBE it's **inspiration over discipleship** that's causing you to miss Jesus. Meaning, you don't so much have a problem with spirituality in general or even Jesus in particular. You're actually inspired by both - by some of the power, authority, morality, teachings and... "*signs*" of it all. So like these crowds, you see Jesus as a great addition to your life/someone who can get you ahead and serve as a kind of jet-pack for your career, your relationships, your goals. So in a sense you "*believe-in*" Jesus like they did...The problem is, Jesus won't "*entrust*" Himself to you, BECAUSE you believe in Him NOT to FOLLOW Him/be His disciple, but because you're occasionally inspired BY Him. Or said another way, you're not a follower, you're a fan. But Friend, terrifyingly so,

fans miss Jesus, because Jesus, as the true temple, didn't give His life and raise it up after 3 days to INSPIRE or enhance your life. He did to GIVE you life/BE your life...as you follow Him.

CONCLUSION:

Ya see?...So let me close by simply asking: Are ya grumpy...with God, yourself, others? Are ya up & down spiritually, or are ya just occasionally inspired, but not really a committed follower of Christ? Friend, if I could be so blunt: It's simply because you don't see Jesus as the true temple - the ultimate reality on which your life is to be based. And the way to fix that isn't by telling yourself you'll do better, work harder or understand it more - that'll just make you grumpier, more up & down, and LESS inspired. No! The way to fix it is by simply beholding and believing that Jesus Christ/the Son of God cares about you so much...loves you so much...that He was willing to - like the temple - let Himself be destroyed, so that you would never again have to bring sacrifices, pay for sacrifices, offer prayers, perform incantations, clean up your life, or do ANYTHING in order to meet with God, find acceptance, and connect with ultimate reality...EXCEPT believe! As the true temple, Jesus has initiated, completed, exemplified, and communicated everything you could ever want or need to ensure that the car of your life never need end up in the river of reality. All you have to do is simply behold and believe! ***Will you do that?...Let's Pray:*** "Lord Jesus, in a moment, as we take up the offering, and reflect together, we pray that you would help us behold and believe - that you'd give us eyes...not to miss you, but to see you for who you are; namely someone, who we can't buy off with religion, or partner with in our own self-sufficiency, or even just be inspired by without truly following you. Help us to see you as the true temple and therefore the bridge to everything we could ever want and need. We pray this in your name...!"